

Bottle released by US scientist in 1956 found

February 7 2014, by Denise Lavoie

It was April 1956, and the No. 1 song was Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel." At the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution on Cape Cod, scientist Dean Bumpus was busy releasing glass bottles into the Atlantic Ocean as part of his work to track currents.

Nearly 58 years later, a biologist studying grey seals off Nova Scotia found one of the bottles in a pile of debris on a beach.

"It was almost like finding treasure in a way," Warren Joyce said Friday.

The drift bottle was among thousands dumped in the Atlantic Ocean between 1956 and 1972 as part of Bumpus' study of surface and bottom currents. About 10 percent of the 300,000 bottles have been found over the years.

Joyce found the bottle Jan. 20 on Sable Island, about 185 miles southeast of Halifax.

He contacted scientists at Woods Hole and dutifully gave them the time and place information Bumpus had asked for in a postcard inside the bottle. His reward will be exactly what Bumpus promised in 1956 to anyone who returned a bottle: a 50-cent piece.

"I didn't want the reward, but they said they are sending it to me anyway," Joyce said, chuckling.

Joyce said the bottle had been sand-blasted over about 75 percent of its

surface. He could still read the words, "Break This Bottle," so he did. Inside, there was a note from Bumpus explaining that the bottle was among many being released to study the ocean.

In those days, there was no other way to study currents, said Steven Jayne, a senior scientist at Woods Hole.

"We didn't have satellites to track currents like we do now. So the only thing you could do was to see where something started and where it ended up," he said. "That was a pretty good approach."

Using the number on the postcard, Woods Hole workers tracked the bottle found by Joyce to a group of 12 released not far off Nova Scotia on April 26, 1956. Joyce found it about 300 miles from where it was released.

Bumpus died in 2002.

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